

STAGING a FIGHT

BY GRACE BUECKENDORF
Features Editor
index.featureseditor@gmail.com

To fight monsters and slay dragons, members of Truman State's theatre department are studying stage fighting to prepare for playwright Qui Nguyen's "She Kills Monsters" — a show about a teenager's discovery of the world of Dungeons and Dragons.

The show will "slash and shapeshift its way into your heart," according to a 2011 New York Times review. The show offers the department the challenge of stage combat scenes that require significant preparation to conduct safely and convincingly.

Senior Jessica Cashion, assistant fight choreographer for the show, said she put her athletic training and theatre majors together perfectly for becoming a stage combat specialist because she is able to look for things that might be unsafe for the actors and determine how to conduct the scenes in a manner that will be convincing to the audience.

Cashion said she first got involved with stage combat as a fight captain for the show "Bedroom Farce," a 2013-2014 Truman production. A fight captain's responsibility is to oversee the fight choreography with the actors and look out for the actors' safety, she said.

Since then, Cashion said she has looked for more opportunities to study fight choreography. When theatre professor David Goyette announced a tryout for an assistant fight choreographer, Cashion said she jumped at the chance.

"Together, [Goyette and I] are conceptualizing what we want each fight to say," Cashion said. "Stage combat is all about using violence to tell a story."

Cashion said there are various factors to take into account when choreographing a fight scene — different types of fights tell different stories. For example, she said having two skilled fighters fighting rather than a mix of skilled and unskilled fighters can change what happens and what story is told.

"We're telling the story of who's winning and who's losing in the moment," Cashion said, "But we're also telling this larger story of this encounter that suddenly words and acting has not become enough for them to settle their disputes, so they've turned to violence."

Cashion said fight choreography encompasses the tension that drives characters to violence and how that violence affects the overall storyline.

Freshman Kitty Corum, a fight captain for the upcoming show, said she is working alongside Cashion to teach the actors how to safely and properly perform their fight scenes.

Corum said they are teaching actors how to use rapiers, daggers, quarterstaves and broadswords properly.

"Broadsword is definitely my favorite [weapon to work with]," Corum said. "There's a lot of power, but also a lot of agility, which is not expected."

The safety of those involved is the most important consideration when choreographing, teaching or acting a fight scene, Corum said. She said being aware of the space surrounding the actors is very important.

Corum said fighters use a "finger check" to check distance before a fight. By sticking their thumb and pinky fingers out as much as possible — and keeping weapons at least that far away from each other — they ensure that if an actor misses their target, they don't harm their scene partner, she said.

"Being aware of your body physically when you are in a fight takes a lot more concentration," Corum said. "As an actor on stage, you have to be aware of where you are and who you're interacting with, but your safety is at risk during a fight, so you have to be extra aware of what exactly is going on and you have to be in control of your own safety at that point."

Senior Rachel Hoffmann is performing in the upcoming show, and is involved in some of the fight scenes. She said the point of stage combat is to learn how to conduct a fight in a way that doesn't injure fellow actors.

"[Cashion] is really incredible," Hoffmann said. "She speaks really clearly about what she wants and she's good at demonstrating things and very good at answering questions about seeing when you're doing things wrong."

Hoffmann said Cashion is good at spotting when a fight scene is not being performed properly, even if a motion only is slightly off from what it is supposed to be. Cashion is encouraging and organized as assistant fight choreographer, Hoffmann said.

While there are a lot of challenging scenes, Hoffmann said the scene she is most excited about is a montage where the actors kill a lot of different monsters at once.

"We don't know what [the monsters] are yet, but we're going to be killing a lot of them," Hoffmann said. "It's probably going to be the longest and most intensive [fight scene] just because there's going to be hundreds of monsters — by hundreds, I mean like eight, but it'll look like a lot on stage."

Editor's note: Bethany Boyle, News Editor, and Melissa Bradford, Editor-in-Chief of Detours Magazine, contributed to this story.



Submitted Photo
Senior Jessica Cashion practices her stage fighting techniques with a quarterstaff at the National Stage Combat Workshop at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. The workshop was one of many ways Cashion prepared for her work as assistant fight choreographer for the upcoming show "She Kills Monsters." She has also helped with fight scenes in Truman productions such as "Twelfth Night" and "Bedroom Farce."

Give value to material objects



BY ANNA GRACE
Managing Editor

As I walked into my job interview, I had my aunt near to my heart, my mother near to my head and my own experience at my hands. Metaphorically, I suppose, but they also were physically near to me — in the form of jewelry.

Much of my jewelry has a meaning to me that makes wearing it

much more significant than a chain around my neck. For important occasions, I like to wear the necklace that belonged to my aunt. I wear the earrings my mom gave me when I want to look dressed up and professional. My dad isn't as big on jewelry, but he did once make me a bracelet out of a bike chain, which is a very my-dad type of jewelry that makes me smile.

My proudest high school jewelry consists of four state track medals I earned as a sophomore, and although I don't wear those to accent my wardrobe, I've never had anything around my neck that felt quite so good. I have a necklace I took to the top of a mountain I climbed, not that you'd ever know by looking at it. But I do, and it's a reminder of a significant accomplishment in my life.

Material objects have new meanings when we use them as containers for our history. Jewelry is one way I keep mine. Many others use jewelry as more

than an accessory — championship rings for athletes, class rings as a token of high school and, of course, wedding rings as a symbol of marriage.

I think objects, whether jewelry, music or something else, can have a value greater than what a price tag would read or a pawn shop would offer. Buying objects that have meaning to you is an investment. Materialism can get a bad rap, but I think if people buy things they enjoy and that are meaningful to them, good for them.

I've lost jewelry. There was the silver bracelet I lost while swimming in a pond during the summer and one of my favorite earrings got hooked on a badminton net and fell into the grass. Despite much searching it never was found.

I still argue the more meaningful the jewelry is, the more you should wear it. Why not wear something that makes you happy or reminds you of someone you love? You might lose it, yes, but is keeping it locked up

or hidden away in a drawer actually enjoying it? I don't think so. This doesn't just apply to jewelry — what about the camera you never use because you're afraid of breaking it, the pen you love and don't use to save the ink, or the nice food you bought but didn't want to eat because then it would all be gone?

It can be hard sometimes but I think we should enjoy the things we have to the fullest while we can. I hope if you have something that matters to you, you enjoy it. And I hope you have something that matters to you.

Maybe you have a special brand of peanut butter you think makes every sandwich seem like it was crafted by an angel, or your favorite drinking glass from a special place or maybe hundreds of photos that deserve a life beyond being buried in your computer's hard drive. Take these tokens from your life and enjoy them — it's better than letting them rest on a shelf.